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Typography and Language: The Form and Function of Post-Aallawa Scripts in Tanjung Tanah Manuscript

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Abstract:

Malay language is a language that grew in Nusantara and has become the oldest culture in the Nusantara archipelago. One of the oldest manuscripts around containing the language is Tanjung Tanah manuscript written in a pre-Islamic Malay texts script. This paper aimed to analyze the development of Malay pre-Islamic script based on the form and function of the scripts found in Tanjung Tanah manuscript using typographic approach to understand the progress of written language and literacy culture in Malay civilization in Nusantara before Islam spread in the archipelago. The result shows that Tanjung Tanah manuscript uses two forms of Post-Pallawa script, Kawi or old Java script and Incung letter. Kawi script has a rounded impression and was used to describe the human-to-human relationship within the codex of Tanjung Tanah manuscript while Incung letter has a sharper impression with oblique slanted to the right and was used to convey the human-to-gods relationship.

Key words: Tanjung Tanah manuscript, Post-Pallawa script, Typography, Form and Function, Malay Culture.

1. Introduction

Malay Kingdom is one of the first Hindi Kingdoms founded in Sumatra, Indonesia. It is located in Jambi around the valley of Batang Hari. The name Malay first came from a Chinese monk named I-Ching who came to Jambi in around 671 to learn Buddhist teachings and philosophy. It was stated on the edict from the Chinese Kingdom dated in 695 that Sriwijaya Kingdom, a Buddhist Kingdom, ruled the entire Sumatra and Malay is one of the land under its rule (Loeb, 2013, p. 5). I-Ching reported that Sriwijaya Kingdom has ruled the Malay Kingdom and make Sumatra as the center for Buddhist teachings so that many Chinese monks came to gain knowledge and learn Sanskrit. These written reports not only spread around in the China region but also were spreading around to Japan. According to Coedés, I-Ching recommends people to visit Fo-shih (Sriwijaya) located in Palembang, Sumatra, to learn the Sanskrit before they continue their journey towards their pilgrimage to Buddhist holy temples and Sanskrit college in India (Collins, 2009, p. 25). This shows that Sanskrit has become such an important foundation in Sumatran letter, which later influenced many letters used in manuscripts around Nusantara area, especially around the pre-Islamic era.

One of the manuscripts that were heavily influenced by Sanskrit was Tanjung Tanah manuscript found in Jambi around Kerinci area. According to the anthropologist C. W. Watson who studied Kerinci area since 1970s, Kerinci is an important area in Indonesia but not many people are interested in studying the significance of this area (Kozok, 2006, p. 1). This is especially true since Tanjung Tanah manuscript was one the oldest manuscripts around Nusantara containing the Malay language, a language that grew in Nusantara and has become the oldest culture in the archipelago.

The scripts found in Tanjung Tanah manuscript consist of the Pallawa script that was influenced by the script from South India and the Incung letter, a script derived from the Pallawa which developed in the Kerinci area. Manuscript in Kerinci was regarded as an important sacred artifact passed down from their ancestors. The people of Kerinci have a ritual called kenduri sko where they showcase the artifact to honor their ancestors as a part of the traditions (Kozok,

2006, p. 41). Thus, understanding the script contained within Tanjung Tanah manuscript can give us insight on the value that was regarded in the pre-Islamic Malay culture. This paper aimed to analyze the development of Malay pre-Islamic script based on the form and function of scripts found in Tanjung Tanah manuscript using typographic approach to understand the progress of written language and literacy culture in Malay civilization before Islam spread in the archipelago.

2. Tanjung Tanah Manuscript

The first research regarding Tanjung Tanah manuscript was done by Petrus Voorhoeve in 1941. At that time, Voorhoeve was a language staff known as *taalamtebnar* placed in Sumatra area by the Colonial rule. Voorhoeve visited Kerinci twice within those times. He intended to register all the manuscripts that exist in Kerinci which, at that time, were a part of sacred artifacts that are important to the people of Kerinci. The manuscripts were written on many forms of material such as bull or goat's horn. Some of them are written on a long bark of bamboo. Voorhoeve was called for a military program at 8 December 1941, just as he finished typing the 252nd manuscripts. These manuscripts, sported 181 pages, were then called *Tambo Kerinci* and were sent to the *Bataviaasch Genootschap* (Center for Indonesian Culture) in Jakarta and to the KITLV in the Netherlands. But the attack of the Japanese troops not long after that hinder the delivery process and these manuscripts are lost amongst the many war and revolution that erupted afterwards.

Another attempt on researching the manuscript was done by Kozok, a researcher who came to Sumatra in 1999 to 2004, researching the paleography of Sumatran letter. In 2002, Kozok visited Kerinci and found that the original script of *Tambo Kerinci* written in the *daluwang* paper survived the war and revolution. He found that the manuscript was the same as what Voorhoeve mentioned in his report and he sent one blank page from the manuscript to Rafter Radiocarbon Laboratory in Wellington, New Zealand to determine the age of the manuscript. The result, announced in 18 November 2003, confirmed Kozok's finding that this was indeed the manuscript from Voorhoeve's report, one of the oldest the pre-Islamic era

manuscript. The radiocarbon test determined that this manuscript might be written in around 14th century (Kozok, 2012, p. 91).

According to Voorhoeve (1941) and Poerbatjaraka (2004) the script used in Tanjung Tanah manuscript was the origin of the old Java scripts. The letters of the script were found in Yupa (ancient epigraph) in Kutai Kartanegara containing the Pallawa scripts that are developed from the Tamil Grantha script from Pradesh, India. This letter was known as the early Pallawa script, the script that was developed in Nusantara. The early Pallawa script persist until around 600-700 where it then developed into the late Pallawa script. One of the earliest late Pallawa script can be seen on the Stone Inscription in Talang Tuwo, Sumatra, which dates back to 684 (Maharsi, 2013, p. 25).

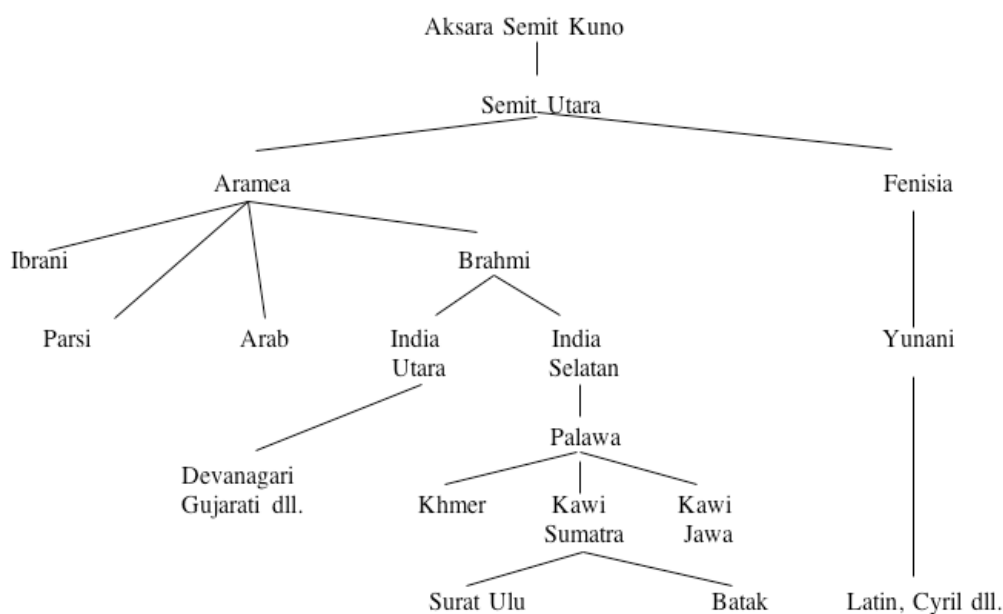


Figure 1. The Nusantara Script tree

Source: Kozok, 2015

The Differences of the early Pallawa and the late Pallawa scripts lie in the contrasting height of the letters. In the late Pallawa script, each letter has an equal height compared to the early Pallawa script. This was influenced by the medium used in the writings and the writing tools. As seen in figure 1, the Pallawa script was later modified into the script known as Kawi or the old Java script. Similar to Pallawa, Kawi underwent a development phase, resulting in two types of script namely the early Kawi and the late Kawi. The early Kawi is direct

transformation from the Pallawa script. It retains some of the Pallawa characters with some distinct adjustments on the letters including the letter 'k', 'ra', and 'la', ignoring the height of the letters. The letters in the early Kawi script tend to be more curved and rounded compared to the Pallawa script which has a sharp and strong character. The late Kawi script changes from the early Kawi script where the letters ended in a rounded block, forming a stroke that makes the letters seem thicker and full.

The late Kawi script is the precursor script that gave birth to the modern Java script and the Balinese script. According to Raffles, Java script is a unique letter consisted of 20 consonants that was called aksara (Maharsi, 2013, p. 26). At the end of the 8th century, the Kawi script system was already spreading across the region in Nusantara and later on slowly replacing the Pallawa script (Collins, 2009, p. 62). As seen in figure 2, the usage of Kawi script persisted from 8th century until the late 15th century.

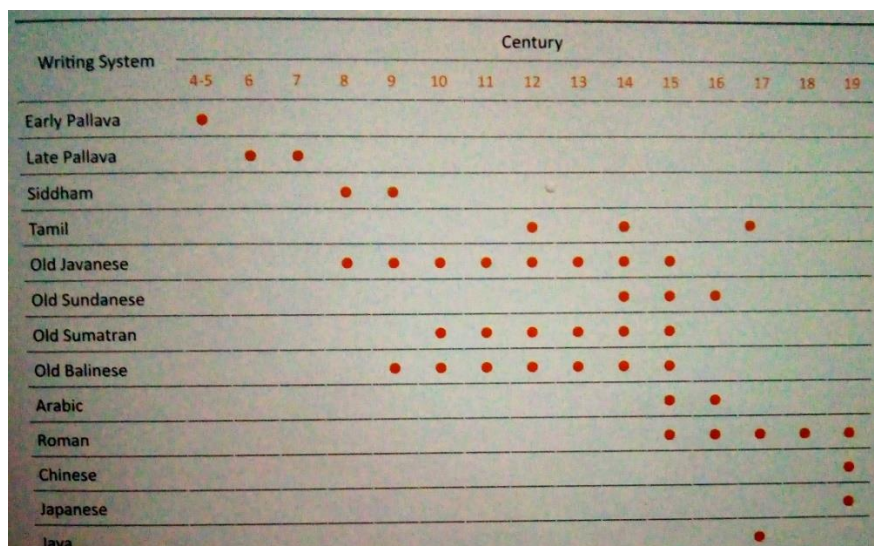


Figure 2. Script usage timeline in Nusantara

Source: (Ikram, et al., 2015)

Besides Post-Pallawa scripts, the script used in Tanjung Tanah manuscript is Ulu Kerinci script, better known as Incung letter. Incung letter was also known as Ulu Kerinci script because it originated from Kerinci district in Jambi province in Sungaipenuh city (Kozok, 2015, p. 64). Incung letter was used in the regions of Kerinci, Lampung, Rejang, Lembak, Pasemah, and Serawai. Incung letter,

sometimes called Ka-Ga-Nga script taken from the sound of its first three letters, has a quite similar appearance between each of its letters. This script was used in widely in Sumatra, covering four major provinces namely Jambi, Bengkulu, South Sumatra, and Lampung.

3. Discussion

The codex of Tanjung Tanah manuscript consists of 34 pages. Typographic approach will be used to analyze the form and function of the script written within these 34 pages of the manuscript by comparing the anatomy of the script to the anatomy of the letter that was developed in the pre-Islamic era in Nusantara region. We will begin by laying down the transliteration done by Voorhoeve and Kozok regarding the content of Tanjung Tanah manuscript and then we will analyze the anatomy of the script found within to understand how they were used to convey the intended meaning of the writings.

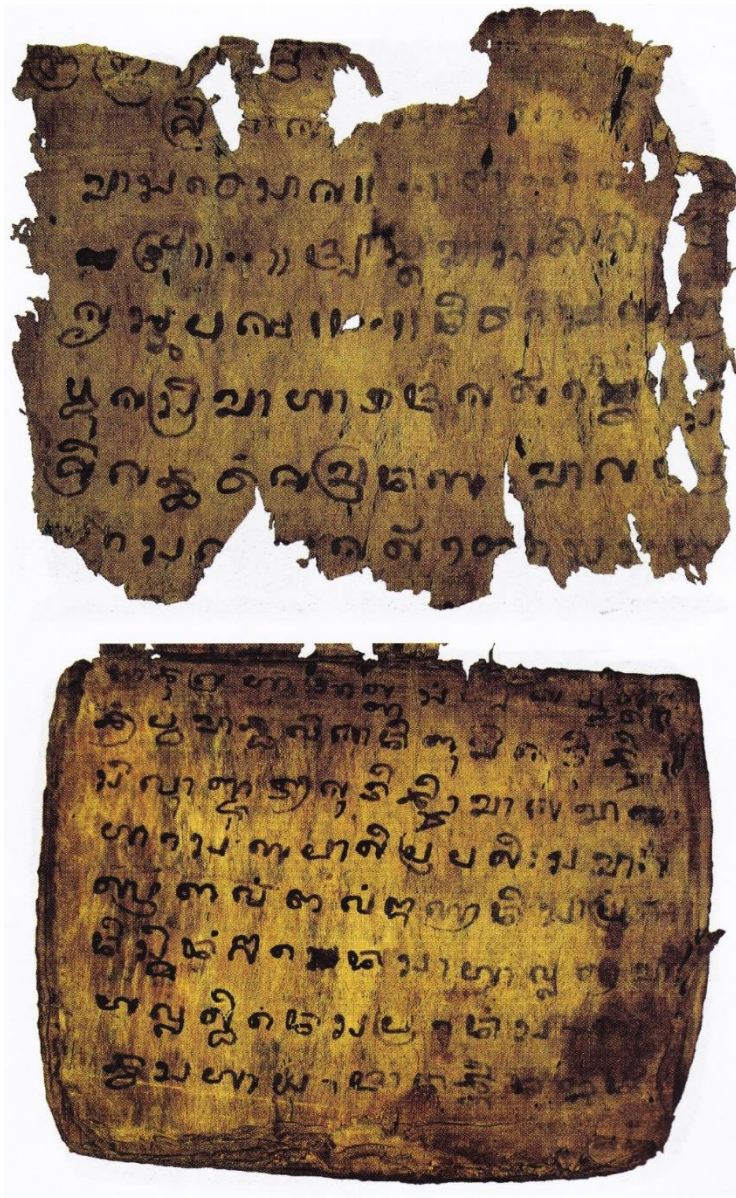


Figure 3. The first pages of Tanjung Tanah manuscript
Source: Kozok, 2006

Figure 3 shows the first pages of Tanjung Tanah manuscript. It shows an introduction consisting of a mixture of languages from Malay to Sanskrit. The introduction served the same way as the modern day speech opening remarks, addressing, among all, the Ruler of Kerinci, the Military Generals, and the Religious Leaders. It then continues to stress the importance to adhere to the constitution written within the codex of Tanjung Tanah manuscript.

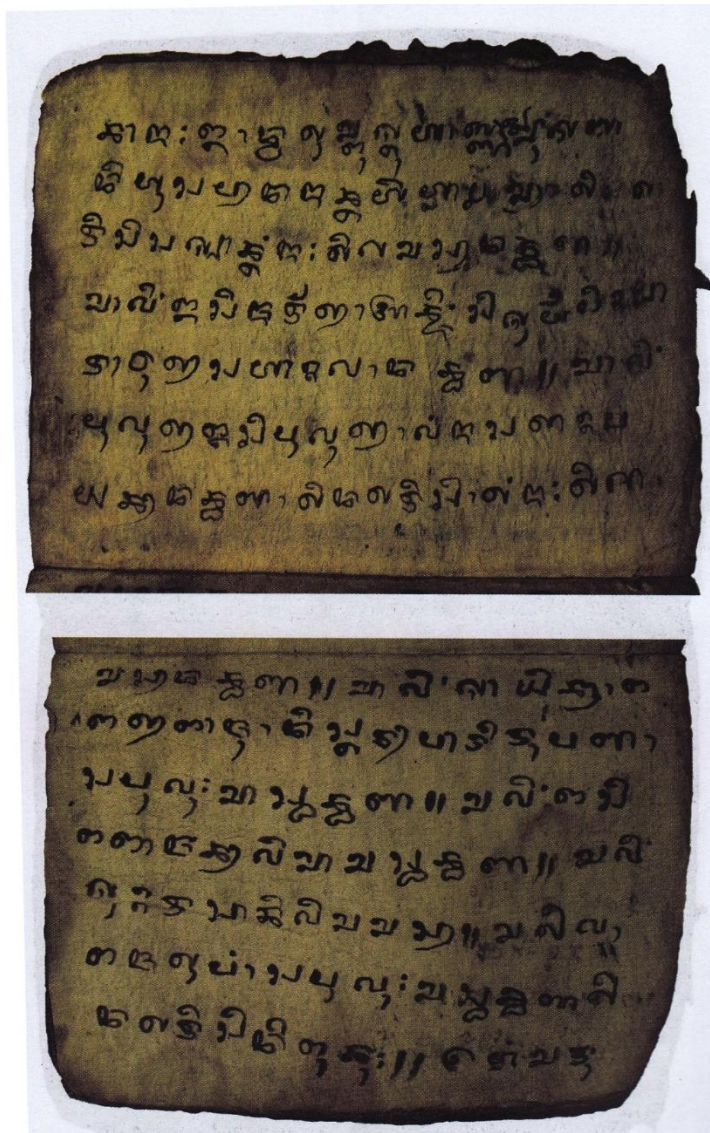


Figure 4. The pages containing the codex of Tanjung Tanah manuscript
Source: Kozok, 2006

Figure 4 shows the codex written within Tanjung Tanah manuscript. The codex mainly stated about fining those who break the rules. One of them was about gambling. Those who gambled will be fined one and a quarter Tael. The codex mainly shows that many crimes have more or less the same amount of fines, but the biggest fined crime mentioned in the codex was about robbery. No matter what, if you rob someone of their possession, be it chicken, goat, fish, alcohol, or even a yam tuber, you will be fined five golds.

The script used to write these parts of Tanjung Tanah manuscript was the Post-Pallawa script akin to the Malay script from the Adityawarman era that flourished in Jawa, Sunda, Madura and Bali. Based on the anatomy of the script, it has an arched stroke with a contrasting thickness. The addition of ligature and diacritics was shown in these pages as a distinct form of the script. The script style depends on the writer, but based on the anatomy, these pages show that the script was influenced by old Java script or Kawi that was derived from Brahmic script. It matches with the script found in the *Tabel van Oud en Nieuw Indische Alphabetten* compiled by Holle in 1887.

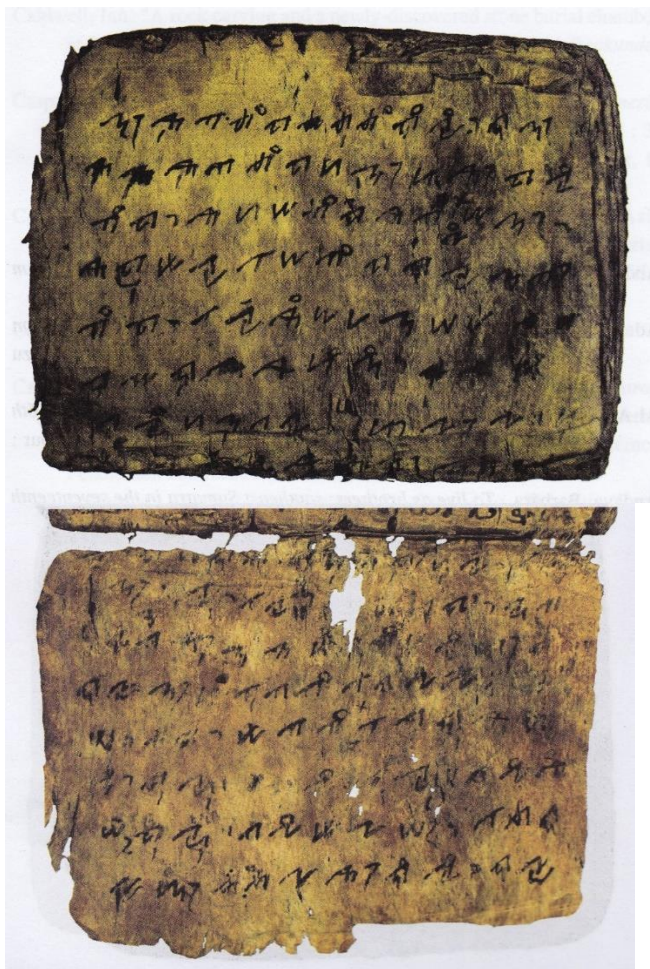


Figure 5. Last pages of Tanjung Tanah Manuscript
Source: Kozok, 2006

Figure 5 shows the last pages of Tanjung Tanah manuscript which was written in a different form of script. These pages contain gratitude to the gods, stating about

the worshipping of the ruler of three worlds which are heaven, earth, and the departed world of ghost and evil beings. Based on the form of the script, these pages were written using the Incung letter or Ulu letter which was developed in the Sumatra region. According to L. C. Westenenk, a Dutch researcher whose interest lies in the manuscripts written in Ulu letter, Incung letter shared the same characteristics to the letter found in Sumatra later on which then called as Rencong script (Kusumah, et al., 1997, p. 110).







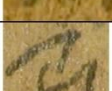

	<i>incung</i>	<i>rencong</i>	Tj. Tanah
ka	↖	↗	
nga	N/	//	
ta	—	↗	
da	↖	↗	
ma	W	X	
ca	δ	↗	
ja	W	↗	
sa	//	↗	
ra	↖	↗	
wa	+	X	

Table 1. Incung letter found within the Tanjung Tanah manuscript compared to the more common Incung letter and the Rencong script.

Table 1 shows the comparison of Incung letter found in the manuscript to the later, more commonly used Incung letter and Rencong script. Based on the anatomy shown in table 1, the Incung letter found in Tanjung Tanah manuscript has a more complex form than what the more commonly used Incung letter has

which has a shared characteristics with Rencong script. So the Incung letter found within Tanjung Tanah manuscript can be viewed as the earlier version of the more commonly used Incung later that was developed later on. Furthermore, the stylings used to write the script follows the style presented in the earlier pages of the manuscript which was written in Kawi script. This resulted in a unique form of Incung letter.


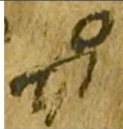

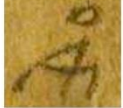
	Teks 1	Teks 2
di		
si		

Table 2. Comparison of Sandangan letter used in Tanjung Tanah Manuscript.

Teks 1 in table 2 shows the Kawi script found in the first pages of Tanjung Tanah manuscript while teks 2 shows the letter found in the last pages of Tanjung Tanah manuscript. Though written in a different script, the stylization of these letters shared the same characteristics on writing the Sandangan letter which incorporated vowels to the existing letters. The unique form cause by the stylization especially can be seen in incorporating the vowel “i” in teks 2 which is supposedly written in Incung letter. But the “i” used in this Tanjung Tanah manuscript is different because it was directly influenced by the stylization of the “i” from the Kawi script which uses a circle above the letter instead of a dot commonly found in other writings of Incung letter. These pages where Incung letter was found were written as an addition to the overall codex of Tanjung Tanah manuscript, so it can be understood that the form of writings used will be different from what has been found in the previous pages while also retaining the same stylization used in writing the letters.

The two writing systems, the Kawi script and the Incung letter were used in Tanjung Tanah manuscript to convey a different text. The Kawi script was used to convey the worldly matters while Incung letter was used to convey a religious matter. Kawi script which has a curved and rounded form with a flat level of

heights conveys the nature of human-to-human relationship in the form of social contract. Rousseau (2003, p.13) stated that in social contract, every man has all rights to everything he needs but also has to respect what does not belong to himself. Social contract means that every man, which is unequal by nature because of their difference of strength and status, are made equal by legal rights. The equality can be seen in the stylization of the writings used in Kawi script within the codex of Tanjung Tanah manuscript. The flat level of heights forms a sense of equality which was shown by the letter having the same level of stroke from left to right. The manuscript also embodies the idea of social contract just as Rousseau stated which can be seen from the fining written within the codex which has taking other people's possession as the biggest fined crime mentioned.

Meanwhile, the Incung letter with a sharp form and an oblique slanted to the right formed various levels of heights. The stroke on the letter started from the bottom on the left to the top on the right. This conveys the nature of human-to-gods relationship where the inferior-superior state is absolute. Thus the Incung letter was used to convey the worshipping of the gods.

4. Conclusion

Tanjung Tanah manuscript contained 34 pages in which 32 of them is a codex written in Kawi script and the last 2 pages are written in Incung letter, both are a form of Post-Pallawa script developed in the pre-Islamic era in Nusantara region. Although written in Incung letter, these 2 pages shared the same stylization to the previous 32 pages especially in the form of Sandangan letter which contributes to the usage of circle for "i" vowel instead of the dot commonly found in Incung letter. The stylization found between the scripts was largely influenced by the tools and medium used to wrote the letter. Pallawa script usually was written on a stone using a chisel that gives off a sharp and strong character; while the Post-Pallawa script rounded impression is often encountered because the writings were done on papyrus, bark, and *daluwang* paper without the need of chiseling out the letter.

The script used in Tanjung Tanah manuscript is very unique because it uses two different form of script to convey a different message. The first 32 pages written in Kawi or old Java script are used to convey the human-to-human relationship

bound within the law. The later 2 pages are an addition to the manuscript that is written in Incung letter, conveying the human-to-gods relationship. The usage of these two scripts in Tanjung Tanah manuscript shows that the Malay civilization in pre-Islamic era in Nusantara region has achieved a well developed literacy culture since they can opt to choose a different form of writings based on the message they wanted to convey. The usage of Kawi script and Incung letter shows the form and function of Post-Pallawa letter in Tanjung Tanah manuscript as an artifact that shows how the pre-Islamic Malay civilization viewed every man as an equal being, bound by legal rights and also equal under the gods as an absolute ruler. Thus, it is crucial to understand the form and function of the ancient script developed in Nusantara region to unearth how the civilization across the archipelago embodies their culture in the form of their writing system and literacy culture.

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